

STRANGER THINGS

11

The
Beginning

Armageddon Book 0: Eleven - Origins by inktopia

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Summary:

Before she was El, she was Eleven, and before that she was Jane. But underneath that simple transition lies a hidden past that threatens the very existence of this world. This is the story of the girl who had everything, yet nothing, the girl who would one day find her identity in the arms of a small boy in Hawkins, Indiana.

[n Progress]

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Act I: The Last Knight

Prologue

It was a beautiful evening somewhere in the sleepy town of Hawkins, Indiana. A smooth wind raced along the road and scattered the leaves that were resting on the pavement. A few meters down the road, an old man was sitting beside a window and staring at the sidewalk where the last of the yellow leaves were finally yielding to the wind and flying towards the horizon. He smiled sadly at the scene and thought that it was probably time for him to let go as well. But he was also wary of the prospective outcome of his decision. He wondered if the boy was ready. He wished he knew the answer.

"Here's your waffle, sir."

The old man was suddenly yanked out of his trance. He gasped at his surrounding but then relaxed as he recalled that he was sitting inside Elma's cafe. He slowly turned his head towards the waitress who placed a plate in front of him and smiled. Before he could thank her, the phone started ringing from somewhere behind the counter. It stopped after two rings, and a few seconds later the host leaned over the counter and yelled, "Mr. Owens. Call for you from the Lab."

Dr. Sam Owens, the director of the Biologics Division at Hawkins National Laboratories, jumped out of his seat and ran towards the phone with a dexterity that surprised nearly everyone in the cafe. He reached the host in a few seconds, snatched the phone from his hands and quietly shouted through the receiver, "Hello?"

A moment later a voice whispered, "It's over."

Dr. Owens breathed a sigh of relief and spoke excitedly, "Thank God. She's free?"

"Yeah. Come get her asap."

"On my way. I'll get her first and then come for you."

"It's too late."

Dr. Owens inhaled sharply, "Where are you?"

"At the source. It's right outside the door."

"Listen, if you take the elevator to the east wing..." Dr. Owens couldn't finish his sentence.

"I found the control matrix, Sam." the voice whispered urgently, "I'll leave it at station alpha."

At one point in his life, Sam Owens would have sold his soul to the devil to get his hands on the control matrix, but now he felt more concerned about the man who was about to accept his fate. He urged through the receiver, "The matrix can wait. You need to leave now."

"Sam!"

The sudden seriousness in the voice shocked Dr. Owens. He pressed the receiver as hard as he could against his ears. The voice continued calmly, "My story ends here old friend. Please let Teresa know that I've fulfilled my duty."

Dr. Owens finally gave up as he grasped the finality in his friend's voice. He sat down on the stool that the waitress had provided and asked the last question, "Is there anything I can do for you?"

There was silence for a few seconds, and then the voice rang through the speaker, "She will save the world, Sam. I am sure of it. But when this all over will she remember any of us?" The voice broke but continued, "Will you write our story, Sam? Will you tell the world how we kept the flame lit for thirteen years at the cost of everything we had?"

"Yes. I will write our story, my friend. I'm sorry for everything."

"It's not your fault old man. All of us had sworn the oath to protect her smile, remember? Too bad none of us will get to see that. Maybe you would, you lucky bastard." The voice chuckled.

"You can still get out."

"I would give anything to escape the lab. To see her one more time.

But this is the end of the line for me, it's trying to break the door no..." A crashing sound drowned the voice for a second, but then it continued at a rapid pace, "If she asks, tell her that I always loved her like a daughter."

A strange sound echoed through the speaker and sent a shiver down Dr. Owen's spine. Then he was forced to pull the receiver away from his ear as an electric spark fried the earpiece, killing the line. He threw the receiver against the phone, turned around and slowly walked towards his table. No one stopped him.

The Last Knight

Somewhere not far away, but beyond the reaches of mortal men, the last wall of an ancient castle finally fell down. The decay had started a long time ago, but the last defense had stood still for a very long time. It finally started crumbling a few hours ago when the lights suddenly went out in a government facility named Hawkins National Laboratory that was situated at the edge of the town. The guard at the main gate tried raising the control center, but the phone lines had lost their power too. He had an uneasy feeling about what was happening inside the lab but had strict instructions to man his post at all times. Just a few hours ago he had heard a strange sound coming from the building in front of him. He had never felt an earthquake, but he was sure that if tremors had a voice, they would have sounded exactly the same. With a practiced movement, he lifted his rifle from the ground and carefully assessed the firing mechanism. Then he rested the gun on his lap and kept watching the entrance to the building with rapt attention. If the facility came under attack, he would be the first or the last line of defense depending on the direction of the charge. But he had a gut feeling that tonight the attack would come from the inside. A few seconds later, his prophecy came true when the sirens went off inside the facility all at once. He picked his gun up and ran towards the building as fast as he could. The sirens declared Code Omega.

Shit had finally hit the fan.

About an hour later, inside that same building, a young girl woke up

to the sounds of sirens blaring in the corridor right outside her door. She opened her eyes with great difficulty and gasped at the absolute darkness that surrounded her bed. Her head was tearing apart in pain that radiated along the temples. A ravenous hunger was ripping her intestines to shreds, and her throat felt like parchment. She instinctively moved her hand to the bedside table but couldn't find the water bottle. Something odd was going on, but she couldn't figure out what it was. Her memory was hazy, and she couldn't even remember her name. The girl used the remaining strength in her body to sit up on the bed.

Abruptly the cacophony of the sirens cut off, and the silence hit her like a splash of cold water and cleared her mind. She could finally remember who she was. She was a monster that should not exist in this world. Her mind was flooded by the images from the past hours, and she screamed in agony at the thought of the horror she had inflicted upon her home.

'The Knight stands at the crossroads of destiny!' A soothing voice echoed inside her soul and brought her back into reality. She stopped crying and looked at her surroundings. The young girl couldn't remember the last time her room had no light or ventilation. She was sweating from the heat, and the air smelled stale and musty. Suddenly voices rang outside her room. Someone was shouting at the top of his lungs, "RUN! Get to the control center! GET TO THE C..."

The voice abruptly cut off as a strange growl reverberated in the corridor. The girl recalled the last time she had heard that sound and found herself hyperventilating with panic. Just a few hours ago she had to run for her life to get away from the monster that followed the footsteps of that sound. That time she had managed to find her way home, but the monster had followed her to this place as well, and there was no place left for her to find refuge. *'FIGHT!'* A strange sensation rattled her soul and fought the darkness for a moment before fading away.

The girl hardened her jaw and clutched her hands together. She needed to get out before the monster broke through the door. Carefully, she made her way to the door and pressed her ears against the metal. No sounds were coming from the outside. The monster had apparently completed its meal and left to find more prey. This was

her only chance. She created a spear using her powers. It was not visible to the naked eye, but she was instructed to imagine her ability as objects to achieve better control. She placed the blade on the door and the base on the opposite wall. Then she closed her eyes and imagined the spear extending. But the door stood its ground against her powers. She tried remembering the experiment that nearly killed her today. She vividly recalled the darkness, the water, the monster that had no face and how Papa was disappointed with her when she couldn't make the gate larger. Her head started throbbing, and she felt a warm liquid coming down from her nostril, she knew it was blood. The monster had returned to eat her alive. Then she remembered an image that flashed by her consciousness at the speed of light. A young girl with a shaved head was standing in front of an army of strange looking monsters that were coming through an evil looking hole in the wall. *At last, she became a monster herself to fight the last battle.*

"NO," she screamed, and the door burst open as it yielded to her psionic powers.

The corridors had lost their central power, but a series of red lights blinked along the upper side of the walls and illuminated the area with a ghostly glow. It took a few seconds for her eyes to adjust to the harsh red glow of the warning lights, then she started running as fast as she could towards the exit that lead to the main gate and towards freedom. Within a few minutes she reached the final corner, turned it and came face to face with a horrible sight. The corridor in front of her was riddled with blood, bones and human flesh. It looked as if someone had put humans and other animals through a grinder and then splashed the contents all over the floor and the wall. The stench of blood filled her nostrils, and she felt like throwing up. But she needed to reach the exit at all costs. She covered her nose with one hand and carefully jogged through the corridor as quietly as she could. It proved to be a somewhat difficult task. She was not wearing her combat gear tonight and kept slipping on the wet floor. In fact, she was wearing her medical tunic, and it was not designed for running, much less sprinting. And to top it off, she had no shoes. It felt like walking through a squishy pile made of jelly and play dough.

The stench increased in strength once she reached the office area. Here, the corridor ran for about fifty meters straight and then ended at a gate that led to the exit.

The offices were utterly devoid of personnel. Some of them had their lights turned on, but they blinked in a steady rhythm for some unknown reason. Eleven looked at the open doors and swallowed. It was utterly dark in a few of them, and the monster could be hiding anywhere. She carefully started walking towards the door one step at a time. It was not that far, but it felt like walking to the moon. After a few nerve-wracking minutes, she reached the door and grabbed the handle. Suddenly she heard an ear-shattering roar from deep within the offices. '*The Monster*,' she thought, pulling the handle with all her strength, but it didn't budge an inch. She felt a presence that was slowly approaching her from the end of the corridor. She gritted her teeth in determination and turned around to face her death.

The presence solidified into a man who was approaching her cautiously. She breathed a sigh of relief and squinted her eyes. He seemed familiar, and she tried to remember who he was. The man wore a white lab coat and carried no guns, thus; '*Scientist?*' She backed up against the door. Scientists were often worse than soldiers. They carried syringes filled with the sleeping potion that they used to put her to sleep. They had foiled her attempts to escape before, and the following punishments were too severe at times. Before Eleven could throw the man with her powers, he raised his arms and spoke quietly, "Eleven? It's me. James."

She didn't respond and kept looking straight at the wall behind him.

James came close to Eleven and slowly crouched in front of her. Suddenly the monster roared from somewhere deep within the compound. In an instant, Eleven jerked her head towards the source and hissed through her teeth, "ENGAGE!"

James felt something odd in her voice. He quickly glanced into her eyes and nearly lost his balance. The kind and compassionate eyes were now filled with terrible hatred and expressed an absolute lack of empathy. James realized that Eleven was slowly progressing towards

Ascended Mode as her body started preparing itself for the upcoming fight.

"FUCK YOU MARTIN!" He had to act quickly before she got lost in the void forever. It had taken him a lifetime to rescue the child from her fate, and he was not going to give up so easily. He wrapped his arms around Eleven and spoke quietly, "Hey kid? What came first? The chicken or the egg?"

It was an utterly stupid and useless question to ask someone who was about to lose her sanity. But James perceived what was going on inside that little head. Her conscious mind was slowly shutting itself down to dedicate maximum resources to her subconscious combat reflexes. It was lifting her inhibitions, so she could become a machine equipped to fight until death. By asking her the question which had kept her awake for days, James engaged the conscious part of the brain responsible for solving puzzles. He was sure that it would pull her into sanity. But Eleven didn't respond and kept looking at the end of the corridor with a pair of dead and cold eyes. James gritted his teeth and whispered, "Come on kid. Fight it. Don't forget what I taught you."

Then a few seconds later he breathed a sigh of relief as Eleven collapsed in his arms and started sobbing, "Monster... gate... blood... Papa."

James needed to understand how far she had gone this time. He spoke gently, "Eleven? Do you remember me?"

Eleven looked at him with a confused stare, "You. Good man. You help..."

She couldn't finish the sentence.

'Damn it. It's getting more difficult every time,' James shivered as he realized how close she was to losing herself this time. He had managed to bring her back, but the shadow still lingered in her soul and prevented her from communicating properly. She couldn't even remember the man who had been her companion for years in that hellhole.

But there would be time to deal with this shit later. He caressed her gently and whispered, "Eleven? What did I tell you about making sentences without verbs?"

Eleven looked at the man who was smiling, "It's alright. It's not your fault."

She suddenly remembered who that man was. His name was James, and he was the only good man in that lab. She tried hard to remember the word the man had taught her the very first day. It started with F, but she couldn't recall it. She stammered in a broken voice, "James... you came! You fre..."

James sighed as he understood what she was referring to. She was trying to remember the word '*friend*.' But her previous battle with the interdimensional monsters had stripped away most of her knowledge along with her cognizance, and it would take a long time to get them back. He cursed his fortune as he remembered the scene that had unfolded in front of him some time ago. The brave little girl had stood ground against an unstoppable monster and pushed it back into the hell it came from. She saved all of them, but not a single person in the facility cared about what the act had done to her soul. To them, Eleven was just a weapon that had served a purpose. But now that James had found her, he would do whatever it took to return her to her old self.

"Have I ever left you?" James winked and handed her something. She gripped it weakly and beamed when she felt the bumps on that object. He never failed to give her a bar of chocolate when she felt sad. Eleven felt safe, at last. The monster could no longer hurt her. James would save her tonight like always and then they would run away to Sweden. He had shown her beautiful pictures of the country that he loved so much. She was busy unwrapping the chocolate when she suddenly heard a strange growl from the end of the corridor. Her blood froze as her dreams shattered into pieces.

James didn't even look back. He merely smiled at Eleven, "I'll take

care of this. I'll open the door, and you run as fast as you can. Okay?"

He desperately hoped that she would not regress again. That might save them, but her soul would not survive the blow. James immediately knew what he had to do, he needed to release her from her nightmare once and for all. He growled softly, "Damn it, Owens. So this was my fate all along?"

Then he glanced at the scared girl who was trying to find solace in his arms and smiled, "And I don't regret it even for a moment."

He tried to stand up, but Eleven wrapped her small hands around his neck tightly, "NO. DON'T GO."

James was fighting tears to smile one last time at the girl who made him believe. He spoke in a hoarse voice, "I have to do this Eleven. You can't fight it. But I can. Scientists do not believe in nightmares."

James gently removed Eleven's arms from his neck, stood up and walked towards the monster in a slow but steady pace. He stopped a few feet away, swapped his keycard on the wall, and the door opened behind them.

Eleven shouted, "COME. RUN."

James didn't look back at her, he was trying to block the monster from finding Eleven as best as he could or perhaps it was the other way around. It was the final hour, almost every guardian had fallen, and James was one of the last two. He decided to tell her the truth, "Listen, Eleven. You are just a child now, but you were being trained to destroy this world at the cost of your own life. But there are people out there who have dedicated their lives to save you from your fate. I was always one of them."

Eleven had no intention to listen to the gibberish. She got up to move to his side.

"NO. GET BACK!"

Eleven instinctively jumped back a few feet. She had never heard James scream at the top of his lungs before. *Was he yelling at the monster?*

James took out a flashlight from his pocket and thumbed the switch. It shined a bright beam forward, and the beast growled in response. So far it had been busy devouring human remains in the corridor, but now it had found living prey. James turned a knob at the base of the flashlight, and it started blinking rapidly. The monster swayed for a moment. The flickering light obviously bothered it. But then the eyeless head opened into a set of serrated teeth, and the beast roared like the thunder. James didn't waver at the sight of the abomination that started advancing towards their position. He took a step forward. His only intention was to close the gate and distract the monster so that Eleven could escape.

Eleven squinted her eyes as tears filled them and blurred her vision. James' image became indistinct for a moment, and Eleven gasped as she remembered a discussion she had with him a long time back.

"James? You saw night?"

James had become used to Eleven's broken vocabulary by that time, but he was still surprised, "Huh? Night? It's the time when there is no sun in the sky. Its night time right now. What do you mean I saw night?"

"No no. Not night. Night. Night is magic men fighting battle." Eleven was stupefied. She thought, 'How can one word mean two things?'

James laughed, "Oh. You mean a K, N, I, G, H, T. Well, these words are called Homonyms. They have different spellings but the same sound. Like C, E, L, L and S, E, L, L."

Eleven was confused, "Night and night?"

James sighed, Eleven's vocabulary still had a long way to go. But he would get there someday, "You know what night without the K means. Knight with the K, on the other hand, were humans who would..."

Eleven didn't let him finish, "Kill monsters."

"Huh? Who told you?"

"Papa. last night."

James stared at Eleven in the eyes and spoke in a gentle, rumbling voice, "No kiddo. That's where he is wrong. Knights do not fight to kill monsters. They fight to protect people from the monsters."

Eleven was frustrated at James' naivety, "Kill monster, save others. Same?"

James laughed and shook his head, "Wrong again. Fighting to kill is easier than fighting to protect. Knights fight to protect, not to kill. You'll learn it someday."

James stood up to leave, he walked to the door and stopped, "Eleven?"

"Yes, James?"

"There's nothing magical about Knights. They are just some ordinary people who have sworn an oath to protect something that matters to them. There are Knights all around us, you just need to keep your eyes open."

James walked out of the room and gently closed the door.

Back in the present moment, Eleven was staring at the back of the man who was about to sacrifice himself to save a girl from her fate. She didn't see the white lab coat anymore; instead, she saw a shining armor made of metal, and in place of the flashlight she saw a brilliant sword made of light. Just like the picture in the book that Papa had shown her that day. She was staring at the legendary knight from the fables, *the last of his kind*.

"Don't leave. You are only fend!" Eleven screamed at the man who had given her a voice and loved her like his own daughter.

James didn't turn around but spoke in a shaky voice, "That's where you are wrong Eleven. You have many friends waiting for you just beyond that gate. Find my brother, Eleven. His name is Scott Clarke. Tell him your name, and he'll shelter you till you find your friends."

'Friends?' The word struck deep into Eleven's heart, but she could not remember what it meant. Before she could ask James the meaning of the word, he casually swiped the keycard at the sensor, and the door closed on Eleven's face. James delivered his final words to Eleven, "Goodbye my Rose. YOU MUST NEVER FORGET WHO YOU ARE."

"NOOOOO!" The door slammed in Eleven's face as the monster's roar drowned James' last words.

Eleven banged the door with her little arms, but no sound came from the corridor. She wanted to break the door open, but she was shocked by the sudden loss and couldn't even feel her powers anymore. She broke down and started sobbing in front of her past. She had finally lost the first hero she had met in her life. She had understood the determination of men who fought to protect and not to kill. And now she must escape this place so that she could remember him forever.

She gritted her teeth through the tears, "NEVER FORGET...."

A familiar voice echoed inside her heart, *'Eleven, you must learn to speak properly. You are a human, act like one.'*

Lightning flashed in the sky as Eleven screamed to the heavens above, "I WILL NEVER FORGET WHO I AM."

Then she ran into the night in search of her identity.

Epilogue

A few days later, in a small cafe named Elma's, Dr. Sam Owens sat down on his designated seat and placed a briefcase on the table. He couldn't find Eleven the other night, but someone else did. Someone who had been destined to find her even before either of them was born. Perhaps he was no longer needed. With a deep sigh, he opened the flaps, took out an old file and laid it on the table. He opened the file to reveal an even older piece of paper filled with words that might have made sense to many people now, but thirteen years ago,

they had stolen the sleep of some of the brightest scientists in the country. Owens smiled as he read the words one by one. But a moment later, he grimaced as his eyes fell on some of the words which had been struck out by a pen a long time after they were written. With a sigh, he brought out an old pen from the briefcase and crossed a set of words on that paper. He never found out what had happened to his friend. The forensics discovered his fingerprints on the elevator buttons, but the trail went cold right after that. It's as if the man had stopped existing in this world a moment after entering the elevator. Of course, they didn't give a moment's thought to the scientist who had lost his life inside the facility that day, but Owens knew the true nature of his sacrifice. He brought out a small package from his briefcase, carefully weighed it and smiled sadly. This was the legacy of the man named James Arthur Clarke, the most courageous human to have walked the earth. But even he couldn't escape his fate.

Dr. Owens turned his head towards a painting hanging on the wall. It was an old piece, and no one knew the painter. But it was an exciting piece which depicted a scene from the legends. A group of men was kneeling in front of a radiant figure who held a bright sword above their heads. Owens counted the number of the knights on the painting and quivered as it matched the number of strikes on the paper. He finally accepted the fact that the Era of the Knights had come to an end, and now the next generation would take over. But could they do the impossible? Owens hardened his jaw and challenged the future, "Do you have what it takes, boy? Then go on. Show me what this generation is capable of. Make me believe."

Then he started packing his stuff to leave the cafe. He was about to put the paper away when he stopped abruptly. The list was comprehensive in its purpose, but one pair of words were still missing from the document. The author did not bother writing the words because she had carved them on the heavens above. But the records needed to be completed for the sake of the future.

And along with that, someone needed to write the story. Someday, long after this world ends in fire, historians from another galaxy might stumble onto these records and discover how the Earth ended. Would they feel surprised? Would they laugh at its fate? Would they

shed tears at the tragedy? Owens would not get his answers, but he would still do his duty. He would write the story of Eleven and her Knights. He carefully packed his briefcase and left the diner to record the beginning of the end of the world.

Author's Note:

This is where the saga of Eleven ends and the story of El begins. Starting from the next chapter we will unravel the mystery of the number Eleven, one moment at a time.